

Spirituality in educational leadership

Engaging with the research

Alaster Gibson

Lecturer, Bethlehem Tertiary Institute, Tauranga, New Zealand

Abstract

This article reviews eight research studies from literature that focus on spirituality in educational leadership. The discussion will be of interest to educational leaders across a range of sectors who intentionally value spirituality within their professional practice and institutional cultures. Spirituality is understood in the literature as a complex and contested phenomenon, the meanings of which may be shaped and reshaped by diverse perspectives and experiences. Spirituality includes personal, social-cultural and transcendent connectedness, meaning making about life and living, and a desire for greater authenticity, resulting in consistency between people's beliefs, moral-values, attitudes and their actions. Readers are invited to reflect on their personal meanings and practice of spirituality in their leadership in the light of the research findings.

Introduction

International academic literature on various aspects of spirituality within education has emerged relatively recently, over the past two decades. It has focused on topics such as matters of the heart, having a high moral purpose, and the importance of values and care of people in education. Some writers have used words like sacred, faith, divine, soul, spirit, spiritual and spirituality in discourse on school-based education reform (e.g. Dantley, 2005; Du Four, 2004; Flintham, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2000; Noddings, 1998; Palmer, 2004; West-Burnham, 2002). This growing body of literature has contributed to what some claim is a shift in emphasis from what schools must do to what school communities must be (Creighton, 1999). Most of this literature engages with spirituality in education from non-religious, humanist, secular perspectives (e.g. Jones, 2005) with some including sacred perspectives, a term that has transcendent meanings but is not limited to any one religious narrative.

The role of spirituality in principal leadership and its influence on teachers is under-researched both in New Zealand and internationally.

There is relatively little empirical work and nothing which gives attention in depth to the significance of spiritual experience in educational leadership. (Woods, 2007, p. 135)

From an American perspective, Ramirez (2009) says in her doctoral literature review, "The literature is quite limited in terms of clear cut examples of what spiritually-centred leadership looks like in practice" (p. 4). Furthermore, Mulford and Edmunds (2009), in their extensive review of research to determine the best conceptual models for successful school principalship, cite the American Educational Research Association's task force for the development of an agenda for future research on educational leadership.

The authors [Leithwood and Riehl, 2003] point out a number of aspects of school leadership that have not been the subject of much formal research and/or that are drawn from other paradigms and are not addressed in their analysis. These aspects include moral and spiritual dimensions of effective school leadership. (p. 20)

Tisdell (2003) recognised this gap and proposed an explanation.

Perhaps the prior silence on the topic of spirituality in areas of academic research is due not only to the difficulty of defining spirituality, but also to the ambivalence of many who work in the academic world that has emphasised rationality and the scientific model for most of the 20th century. (p. 25)

Spirituality and its contribution to organisational transformation

Malone and Fry (2003) from Tarleton State University undertook a quantitative field experiment in their local central Texas school district to "determine if there was a relationship between the qualities of spiritual leadership and teacher organisational commitment and productivity" (p. 5). Their intention was to engage with two schools in the difficult task of organisational transformation in which significant changes would be made to the workplace "environment, vision, goals, strategies, structure, processes and organisational culture" (p. 6).

"Spirituality is understood in the literature as a complex and contested phenomenon, the meanings of which may be shaped and reshaped by diverse perspectives and experiences"

Underpinning their method were Senge's (1990) five disciplines of learning organisations and Fry's (2003) theoretical work on spiritual leadership as a causal model for organisational transformation. This model was linked to intrinsic motivation theory and incorporated a number of concepts including "vision, hope/faith, and altruistic love, theories of workplace spirituality, and spiritual survival" (p.8). Malone and Fry (2003) explain the practical meaning of some of these concepts.

Creating a vision wherein leaders and followers experience a sense of calling in that their life has meaning and makes a difference; establishing a social/organisational culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others. (p.8)

This research was based on the belief that spiritual leadership could positively contribute to the needs of school personnel. They believed the practice of spiritual leadership could develop in people a sense of calling and membership leading to greater congruence in terms of their shared vision and values, as well as improved individual, team and organisational empowerment. In summarising their research design and results, Malone and Fry (2003, p.2) say,

The school which reported high levels of vision and altruistic love also indicated high levels of commitment, motivation and retention of staff

Our field experiment initially examined 229 employees from three elementary and one middle school to test and validate a general casual model for spiritual leadership, employee spiritual survival, and organisational commitment and productivity. A one-year longitudinal field experiment was then conducted with two of the original schools with an OT [organisational transformation] visioning/ stakeholder analysis intervention, performed in one school with the other as a control. Initial results show strong support for the model and the intervention.

A closer examination of their results shows the school which reported high levels of vision and altruistic love also indicated high levels of commitment, motivation and retention of staff. The other school, which lacked vision and love, experienced a noticeable deterioration in its organisational culture. This school was marked as "a very intimidating, conflict ridden environment" (p.16). In a subsequent report, the principal of the first school said, "Everything we did as a campus was a result of the campus mission and values which was a direct result of our work with the spiritual leadership theory" (Malone & Fry, 2003, p.16). However, in their conclusion, the researchers concede, "The conceptual distinction between spiritual leadership theory variables and other

leadership theories and constructs must be refined" (p.18). Secondly, they point out that although there was evidence validating value-based leader behaviour having positive effects on "follower motivation and work unit performance" (p.19), more research is needed in terms of linking spiritual leadership to such effects.

Key points for reflection

Which practical aspects of educational leadership described in this first example of research by Malone and Fry (2003) do you identify with in your own practice? How do you promote a sense of calling, membership and shared values within your organisation? What might 'altruistic love' look like and sound like in your leadership context? What effect do you perceive your spirituality informed leadership values are having on your organisation's transformation and effectiveness? How do you know and how might you find out?

Spirituality and its relationship to key leadership practices

Another quantitative study of interest is that by Wellman, Perkins and Wellman (2009), assistant professors from Northwestern State University, Los Angeles. They researched the question, "What is the relationship, if any, between educational leaders' spirituality and leadership practices?" Spirituality was defined as an 'independent variable' (p.2), and measured by the inventory on spirituality which was developed by Rayburn and Richmond (2003). This inventory included three subcategories called caring for others, transcendence, and seeking goodness, truth and forgiveness. Five leadership practices were selected based on the work by Kouzes and Posner (2003). These were described as, "challenging the process, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, modelling the way, and encouraging the heart" (p.2). Together these five practices were identified as the dependent variable. The data was gathered from a survey of 71 participants out of 100 randomly selected, Texan school principals (35 females and 36 males) during 2004–5. The data was analysed using several statistical operations.

The findings yielded, statistically significant relationships between spirituality as measured on the inventory on spirituality and the five leadership practices. More specifically, the findings showed a relatively strong relationship between spirituality and modelling the way; a significant relationship between spirituality and inspiring the way; a strong relationship between spirituality and challenging the process; a moderately strong relationship to

enabling others to act; and a moderately strong correlation between spirituality and the leadership practice of encouraging the heart. Furthermore, there was a stronger effect between the horizontal or interpersonal dimensions of spirituality and leadership than the transcendent dimensions.

In the discussion of the findings, the authors say, “The results of this study revealed that spirituality and good leadership practices are correlated at a very significant level for the participants in the survey” (p. 3). In their concluding remarks, the authors indicate that an empowered spiritual, scholar-practitioner might be an ideal blended form of leadership, because “spirituality is having an anchor that provides the courage to do that which is right for others in a manner that is caring, just, equitable and democratic” (p. 3).

These findings are important for educational leaders. Firstly, they show an empirical link can be established between a particular construct of human spirituality and educational leadership praxis. The findings suggest that this link can be positive, and complementary alongside ‘good leadership’. Further reading revealed that the inventory developed by Rayburn and Richmond (2003) intentionally excluded religious dimensions of spirituality which were placed under a separate list. The research does not explore the subtle, context specific ways that spirituality works within school leadership praxis, and the specific ways that teachers and their teaching might be affected. This research identified the prevalence of certain practices but I am curious as to why the participants practiced them. I also wonder whether in fact spirituality can be neatly made into an ‘independent variable’ from leadership practices such as inspiring a shared vision and modelling the way.

Key points for reflection

In reflecting on this research by Wellman, Perkins and Wellman (2009) it is important to note that spirituality correlated highly “with good leadership practices” (p. 3). It suggests that effective spirituality needs to go hand in hand with competent leadership. How relevant do you perceive your spirituality is to ‘modelling the way’ which was one of the leadership practices identified in this study? In what ways do you intentionally blend or integrate your personal meanings of spirituality into the daily life of your educational leadership? Explore keeping a weekly journal in which you record critical incidents that demonstrate your pursuit of the characteristics of spirituality mentioned in this research such as goodness, truth and forgiveness.

Importance of spiritual experience in educational leadership

A third study, also from England, was conducted by Woods (2007), an Honorary Research Fellow in the School of Education at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, who examined, “The importance of spiritual experience as a phenomenon which enables leaders to be better resourced internally and find deeper meaning, and to provide evidence of the significance and influence of spiritual experience for educational leadership in schools” (p. 135).

This empirical research gathered data from surveys from 244 primary, middle and secondary school head-teachers within three local education authorities (LEAs) in England, with a response rate of 43%. Of this sample, 54% of the head-teachers came from non-denominational schools, 45% from Church of England and Catholic schools and 1% from Jewish schools. The self-identified religious beliefs of the head-teachers in the sample were reported as 76% Christian, 15% agnostic, 5% atheist and 4% described as ‘other,’ which was consistent with the religious demographics of the total head-teacher population within the three LEAs. 49% of the participants identified the importance of spirituality as very important personally, 36% of some importance, 8% of little importance, and 6%, not important.

The research also obtained further interview data from 7 of the head-teachers who were selected by theoretical sampling (Silverman, 2001). This sample included 2 agnostics, 1 atheist, 1 humanist, and 3 with Christian religious beliefs. There was a balance of male and female head-teachers and type of schools. Spirituality was perceived to be ‘very’ important to the atheist, one of the agnostics and two of the religious head-teachers and of ‘some’ importance to the others. All seven of these participants affirmed that they often had been conscious of and perhaps been influenced by some power, whether God or not, which may either appear to be beyond their individual selves or partly, or even entirely within their being.

In summarising her findings, Woods (2007) identified that spiritual experiences vary widely in intensity and frequency and are “not confined to religious believers” (p. 151). Furthermore, Woods says that spiritual experiences of the type that “appear to connect with some spiritual power, enhance capacity for practical action and increase ethical sensitivities and orientation are widespread among headteachers” (p. 143). The findings also suggest that spirituality contributed in a variety of ways to head-teachers’ resources and to the way they “imbued spirituality in their

“*Spiritual experiences of the type that ‘appear to connect with some spiritual power, enhance capacity for practical action and increase ethical sensitivities and orientation are widespread among head-teachers’*”

role" (p. 143). Spirituality in the majority of these head-teachers was perceived to contribute towards shaping, sustaining and informing their outward action. Approximately two-thirds of the participants disagreed that spirituality was an "entirely private matter" (p. 149) having nothing to do with their job as head-teacher. 46% of the 244 head-teachers were of the view that spirituality was a natural dimension of school leadership, 30% were uncertain.

Underpinning this research was the theoretical work by the American humanist, psychologist, and philosopher William James and Sir Alister Hardy, a former professor of natural history at the University of Aberdeen. Hardy (cited in Woods, 2007, p. 65) viewed, "the human capacity for sensing the spiritual" through the perspective of a Darwinian theory of evolution, he argued "against purely materialistic interpretations of Darwinian natural selection", and said that "it is not valid to conclude that man's spiritual side is simply the superficial by-product of material processes" (p. 65).

Although Woods (2007) believes there is substantial evidence for the existence of spiritual experiences (e.g. Hay & Hunt, 2000) she also cautions that, "it is important not to make simplistic associations between spiritual experiences and attitudes and attributes of leadership; spiritual experience is not the only factor to influence attitudes to spirituality and leadership" (p. 136). In her literature review, Woods (2003) acknowledges that the reality of spiritual experience is contested by a range of arguments which include the subjective nature of people's claims and their lack of consistent confirmability. Other arguments discussed by Woods are socio-cultural explanations and reductionist arguments. This latter argument holds that people's assertion of spiritual experiences can be explained "more plausibly by reference to natural (and often pathological) factors" (p. 77). In the conclusion of her discussion on these arguments Woods (2003) says,

We are dealing with a legitimate phenomenon, that is, there are scientific grounds for concluding that what are studied as spiritual experiences indicate a phenomenon of some sort that can be taken to exist. (p. 78)

Key points for reflection

In considering Woods' (2007) research, can you describe any spiritual experiences in your leadership practice? How do you perceive they have influenced your leadership? Do you agree that your spirituality contributes to shaping, sustaining and informing your leadership actions? Explain.

Spirituality as the core of the person who leads

A fourth example of research acknowledging spirituality in educational leadership is the ethnographic study of a principal by Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper (1999), academic researchers based in two universities in Wisconsin. Their qualitative study focused on a female principal of a special education school in a Midwestern city in the United States. The context of their inquiry was inclusive education (equal opportunities for children with disabilities) and in particular, empowering principal behaviours.

The research method incorporated a longitudinal approach, gathering data from interviews and surveys over a fifteen-month period, and involving over thirty participants including teachers, special education teachers, teacher aides, parents, children, and administrators. The findings affirmed the importance of the principal stimulating on-going responsive critique by staff of their practice while at the same time developing a supportive, just and democratic school environment in which such reflective practice was able to operate safely. The authors also cite a statement from the principal, who said, "Spirituality is the core of my leadership" (p. 203), suggesting that it was both a significant and integral part of her personal self and professional practice, working from the inside, out.

Empowering principal behaviours are under-girded by a spirituality grounded in six beliefs: valuing personal struggle, recognising the dignity of all people, blending the personal and professional, believing people are doing their best, listening, and dreaming. (p. 203)

These findings suggest that in this case, spirituality in educational leadership was perceived as highly integrated. This may explain some of the challenges acknowledged in the two previous research reviews in terms of identifying spirituality as a singular causative effect in leadership. Furthermore, these concluding statements link spirituality with beliefs that inform professional practice. That is, they acknowledge the importance of cognitive predispositions and that externalised professional leadership practice is informed by what the leader believes about people and the best ways to work together to achieve shared goals. Another significant finding was the importance of the degree of congruity between the principal's stated beliefs and observable behaviours. The authors assert the effectiveness of spirituality in the principal's leadership and her influence as leader were linked to this "integrity" (p. 205).

Spirituality in educational leadership was perceived as highly integrated

Key points for reflection

Having read the review of the research by Keyes, Hanley-Maxwell and Capper (1999), in what practical ways might spirituality reveal itself in your daily leadership life if spirituality was at the core of your leadership?

Linking spirituality with sustainability and replenishment in educational leadership

The fifth example is a study in the United Kingdom by Flintham (2003), an experienced secondary school head-teacher, consultant and research associate of the National College for School Leadership. This study had six aims, three of which are particularly relevant to this discussion.

To describe the perceived individual spiritual and moral bases of headship across a range of head-teachers: To codify identified strategies for individual head-teacher sustainability and replenishment: To consider examples of how spiritual and moral leadership is displayed by reflection on critical incidents within leadership stories. (p.4)

This research was a qualitative inquiry involving a cross-sectional sample of twenty-five serving head-teachers from a wide variety of primary and secondary schools from within the geographical region of Devon to Durham, Lancashire to London. The sample included fourteen male and eleven female head-teachers who had a wide range of experience. The participants worked in eight church schools, thirteen secular schools and four described as 'high ethnic'. The schools varied in student roll size from 60 to 1600 and were situated in a variety of contexts including poor inner urban areas, and more affluent suburban and rural areas. The research method focused on a single, semi-structured and open ended, hour long, face to face interview with each of the head-teachers. A key focus was to draw on participants' recollection of critical incidents and their reflection upon these to illustrate their responses to the questions (Flanagan, 1954). The data derived from each head-teacher was therefore personalised and not triangulated by any other data gathering instruments or other personnel from within their respective schools.

Flintham draws a useful but debatable distinction between spiritual and moral management and spiritual and moral leadership. He says that within the English educational context spiritual and moral management might include religious education and citizenship in the curriculum. Whereas, spiritual and moral leadership he believes is "concerned with the often intangible aspects of interpersonal engagement and quality of relationships" (p.3). He

also explains that this spiritual and moral leadership can be particularly tested by external pressures and yet, "is preserved by a clearly articulated structure of moral and ethical values" (p.3). He sums up this difference between leadership and management as "the difference between being and doing" (p.3), which I believe oversimplifies and dichotomises what are essentially, two highly integrated aspects of educational leadership. Flintham's post-structural conceptualisation of spiritual and moral leadership is clearly articulated.

[It] does not have exclusively religious connotations or linkage to a specific set of beliefs. It is based on a wider concept of 'secular spirituality': whatever it is that gives the individual their foundations of ethical behaviour and bases of belief. (p.3)

The main findings of this study showed the presence of diverse "faith perspectives and belief systems" (p.6), which reflected the pluralistic English society and cross sectional research design. It also affirmed his pre-supposition that "spirituality is accepted as a common human phenomenon which includes but is not defined by organised religion" (p.8). He also believed the findings justified the use of "secular spirituality" underpinning the research. The head-teachers' value systems guiding their moral and spiritual leadership were divided into categories including egalitarian, vocational, and Christian perspectives, with some of the participants identifying with more than one of these. The egalitarian value system was described as "a belief in the essential goodness of humanity" and was identified by just under a quarter of the participants. Over 60% of the head-teachers cited "a Christian value framework as influencing their professional practice" (p.9), more than twice as many as the number of church schools in the study. One head-teacher in a non-church school was reported as saying, "I will share my personal faith but not evangelise. I believe in parity of esteem for all faiths; this is the safe place for spirituality" (p.9).

Another aim of this research was to inquire into how these head-teachers engaged in replenishing and sustaining their moral and spiritual leadership. Ten participants discussed how they drew upon their own core beliefs, six head-teachers (not all from church schools) explained how their reservoir was sustained by "an active Christian faith". This number was less than half of those who had previously cited a Christian value framework as underpinning their leadership. Participants also cited a wide range of networks that contributed to their overall resilience. In terms of critical incidents where their reservoirs for moral and spiritual leadership were perceived

Spirituality is accepted as a common human phenomenon which includes but is not defined by organised religion

to be drawn upon, the results were grouped around three categories namely, community tragedies, personnel problems and organisational crises.

Key points for reflection

In considering the research by Flintham (2003), can you describe some critical incidents where your spirituality in leadership was tested by external pressures? How do you perceive your spirituality contributed to your sense of sustainability and replenishment?

Spirituality related to educational leadership style

The sixth example of research into spirituality in educational leadership is a study by Walker and McPhail (2009), from Morgan State University, Baltimore, who explored “community college president and chancellor perceptions of the phenomenon of spirituality and the role of spirituality in their leadership style” (p. 321). Fourteen participants with diverse cultural, gender, age, and experience demographics were selected from various geographic locations within the United States. Their selection was also based on their “interest in the topic of spirituality”; however, this interest is not elaborated upon in the article.

The findings included religious and non-religious definitions of the phenomenon of spirituality. Most of the “religio-spirituality perspectives”, a term identified in their literature review (Moran & Curtis, 2004), were described as a “belief in a higher power, specifically God, for meaning-making, guidance, protection, decision-making, and a personal journey that leads to a core of central values” (p. 326). Some of the findings describe non-religious perspectives, for example, one participant emphasised “ethical behaviour” (p. 327). The findings also describe the ways in which participants expressed spiritual qualities in their work. These included their values and beliefs, community building, creativity and communication, and that centre of servant-leadership. All participants, “regardless of race or gender, indicated that spirituality plays a role in the work of community college leaders” (Walker & McPhail, 2009, p. 331).

In terms of what that role meant and how spirituality influenced the leaders’ respective organisational cultures, the findings report that the participants believed they “symbolically shape organisational culture and spirit by influence through empowering others, ceremonies, acknowledging faculty and staff, and staff development and relationships with students” (p. 338). This research also describes spirituality in educational leadership

as connected to participant’s self-reflexive thinking, their sense of wholeness, their boundary setting and balance in life, and their focus on being authentic, resilient and remaining connected to others. It also highlighted that for many of these participants their spiritual practices included the “prioritisation of faith, beliefs and values” (p. 338).

I found it interesting that the findings included the presence of spirituality in what the authors call, “proudest accomplishments” and “moments of disappointment” (p. 332). This extended upon Flintham’s (2003) findings which tended to focus only on spirituality as a source or reservoir of hope and strength within negative and difficult aspects of educational leadership. I was curious to note the way the article by Walker and McPhail (2009) referred to religio-spirituality which provided an inclusive recognition that spirituality, for some people, can have religious meanings connected to a higher power and specifically to God. I also noted in the findings the importance of critical reflection in assisting the leaders to maintain authenticity and relational connectivity with others in their professional practice.

Key points for reflection

In reflecting on the research by Walker and McPhail (2009) how do you feel spirituality contributes towards your engagement in self-reflexive thinking, boundary setting, work-life balance and desire for integrity in your leadership practice?

Spirituality in the daily praxis of educational leadership

Another important study on spirituality in educational leadership is the doctoral thesis by Ramirez (2009). Her qualitative, exploratory case study, focused on spirituality in the praxis of four elementary, public school principals from Texas, Northern Virginia and California. Prospective participants were identified through a nomination process in which her colleagues suggested the names of educational leaders who “appeared to lead through spirituality” (p. 58). Selection was made to provide a range of demographics. The participants conceptualised their spirituality as socially constructed, separate from religious institutional frameworks and connected to diverse sources.

Integral to her research methodology was the testing of eight out of some forty-two key concepts in Houston and Sokolow’s (2006) theoretical framework, *The spiritual dimension of leadership*. The eight concepts emphasised leadership intention and attention, recognition of uniqueness of gifts, gratitude, uniqueness of life lessons, a holistic

“I also noted in the findings the importance of critical reflection in assisting the leaders to maintain authenticity and relational connectivity with others in their professional practice”

perspective, openness and trust. The research method included gathering data from three semi-structured one-to-one interviews, a focus group meeting and electronic and written journal documents. Two of the research questions were, “What are the lived work experiences of principals that provide evidence of spirituality?” and “How do principals perceive the meaning of spirituality in their work?”

The most critical finding was the need for and practice of openness. Connected with this practice were in-depth reflection, self-awareness and relationship building. Another key finding was that all four participants used what Ramirez calls, “a spiritual filter as a basis of decision-making and as an informed framework for their leadership” (Ramirez, 2009, p. viii). This notion of a spiritual filter was described as going inward and being reflective, listening to an inner voice as participants ran situations through it, “seeking guidance, direction, and peace, all the while adding the lessons learned to their cache of wisdom” (p. 111). Also of interest was the inclusion of negative effects of leading through spirituality, which were described as “misunderstanding and stereotyping, attacks on leadership style, increased vulnerability, isolation, and over-whelming self-imposed pressure” (p. viii). The positive effects attributed to spirituality by participants’ were that they derived strength, courage, wisdom, and stability, and an increase in relational skills.

Key points for reflection

Considering some of the findings of Ramirez (2009), in what practical ways do you perceive your spirituality contributes towards relationship building in your educational leadership? Do you agree that your spirituality acts as a spiritual filter when engaging in decision-making? Explain. From your perspective, is your expression of spirituality in leadership sometimes misunderstood? Why do you think that is so and what practical action could you take to improve the situation?

Spirituality as a dimension of principal’s ‘way of leading’

The final example of research into spirituality in educational leadership that I have included in this discussion is the work by Dixon (2002), for her Masters degree in Education through the University of Waikato in New Zealand. Her qualitative case study involved five principals with diverse demographics, who were working in public, state primary schools in the Waikato region. The focus of her inquiry was whether these five principals had

explicit philosophies of education and leadership, and whether spirituality was part of the principals’ way of leading. If so, what impact did these issues have within their schools? Spirituality is understood in this study to be inclusive of diverse perspectives including cultural and transcendent views. She recognised the issue of power inherent in spirituality to either “liberate or violate” (p. 37). That is, it could be both positive and negative as a contributing factor of leadership influence.

Her findings revealed that all five principals “acknowledged an aspect of spirituality within their leadership” (p. 182) and several embraced theistic perspectives. Spirituality in principal leadership was described behaviourally in terms of relational connectivity, respect, care, equity, sensitivity to diversity, and making a conscious effort to “speak and act on the outside in ways that were the same as the truth they knew on the inside” (p. 184). Importantly, according to Dixon, issues such as personal motivation, balance in life, workplace resilience, and having an attitude to serve and value each person were found to be identified by the principals to their spirituality or spiritual beliefs. Unfortunately, the scope of her thesis precluded gathering data from the staff at these five schools to “obtain their perceptions of the impact of their principals’ philosophies” (p. 189). There was also an absence of comment on possible contextual factors that might mediate the integration of spirituality into workplace practice.

Key points for reflection

Based on Dixon’s (2002) research, do you agree that there is power inherent in spirituality in leadership to either violate or liberate? Have you ever encountered experiences of this? How do you ensure that your spirituality in educational leadership is not used in abusive ways? What checks and balances do you have to ensure your spirituality is expressed in appropriate, inclusive and safe ways within your organisation?

Conclusion

This paper has discussed eight examples of research related to spirituality in educational leadership. The findings raise a variety of important issues relevant for leaders, their practice and their effectiveness within their organisations. Each example of research has been practically applied by way of key points for the reader to reflect on. The intention has been to stimulate critical consideration of personal meanings of spirituality and how these might contribute to such things as building collegial relationships, resilience and organisational

“The positive effects attributed to spirituality by participants’ were that they derived strength, courage, wisdom, and stability, and an increase in relational skills”

Educational Administration

“In this way spirituality might become more intentional and authentic, residing at the core of the person who leads and their leadership practice”

effectiveness. In this way spirituality might become more intentional and authentic, residing at the core of the person who leads and their leadership practice. **TEACH**

References

- Conrad, D. A., Brown, L. I., & Crockett, J. (2006). Spirited to leadership: Caribbean educational leaders share their stories. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning* 10(17), 1–15. Retrieved from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/iejll/vol10/crockett>
- Creighton, T. (1999). Spirituality and the principalship: Leadership for the new millennium. *International Electronic Journal for Leadership in Learning*, 3(11), 1–8. Retrieved from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/iejll/creighton>
- Dantley, M. (2005). Faith-based leadership: Ancient rhythms or new management. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 18(1), 3–19.
- Dixon, J. (2002). *Philosophy, spirituality, power and authenticity in primary school leadership*. A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education, University of Waikato, NZ.
- DuFour, R. (2004). Leading edge: Leadership is an affair of the heart. *Journal of Staff Development* 25(1). Retrieved from <http://www.nsdc.org/news/jsd/dufour251.cfm>
- Flintham, A. (2003). *Reservoirs of hope. Spiritual and moral leadership in headteachers. National College for School Leadership*. Retrieved from <http://www.standards.dcsf.gov.uk/ntrp/lib/word/Flintham.doc>
- Jones, L. (2005). What does spirituality in education mean? Stumbling towards wholeness. *Journal of College and Character*, 6(7), 1–7.
- Keyes, M., Hanley-Maxwell, C., & Capper, C. (1999). Spirituality? It's the core of my leadership. Empowering leadership in an inclusive elementary school. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 35(2), 203–237.
- Malone, P., & Fry, L. (2003). *Transforming school through spiritual leadership. A field experiment*. Retrieved from <http://www.tarleton.edu/~malone/SLTAOMPeggy0228.doc>
- Mulford, B., & Edmunds, B. (2009). *Successful school principalship in Tasmania*. Launceston, Tasmania: Faculty of Education, University of Tasmania. Retrieved from <http://fcms.its.utas.edu.au/educ/educ/files/SSchool.Principalship.in.TAS.pdf>
- Noddings, N. (1998). Longing for the sacred in school. A conversation with Nel Noddings. *Educational Leadership*, 56(4), 28–32.
- Palmer, P. (2004). *A hidden wholeness: The journey toward an undivided life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Ramirez, L. (2009). *Spirituality in the praxis of educational leadership. Four public school principals' perspectives on leading through spirituality*. A dissertation in educational leadership. Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of Texas Technical University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education. Retrieved from <http://tinyurl.com/y8tdwlr>
- Sergiovanni, T. (2000). *The lifeworld of leadership: Creating culture, community, and personal meaning in our schools*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Tisdell, E. (2003). *Exploring spirituality and culture in adult and higher education*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Walker, M. W., & McPhail, C. J. (2009). Spirituality matters: Spirituality and the community college leader. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 33(3–4), 321–345.
- Wellman, W., Perkins, G., & Wellman, N. (2009). Educational leadership: The relationship between spirituality and leadership practices. *Academic Leadership: The online Journal*, 7(1), 1–5. Retrieved from http://www.academicleadership.org/empirical_research/579.shtml
- West-Burnham, J. (2003). *Leadership and spirituality*. Leading Edge Seminar Thinkpiece, NCSL. Retrieved from http://newportal.ncsl.org.uk/research_and_development/leading_practice_seminars/randd-leading-spirituality-outcomes.cfm?jHighlights=spirituality
- Woods, G. (2007). The bigger feeling: The importance of spiritual experience in educational leadership. *Educational Management Administration Leadership* 35(1), 135–155.